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30 March 2015

Wray A3

The Mint Green Cage

**Motiya**

June 10th, 2013. Location: Sderot

*“All my life I've been waiting for….I've been praying for….For the people to say…That we don't wanna fight no more….There will be no more wars….And our children will play….One day, one day.”*

“Ugh, Chaya, can you please shut that off?” I groaned, cocooned in Chaya’s old sleeping bag.

“If you can name the singer!” She danced throughout her room, yanking on her blue and white football uniform.

“A Rabbi?” I asked, slapping the snooze button on Chaya’s alarm clock radio.

“No! Matisyahu. It’s called *One Day.* Come on, it is like you aren’t even trying to get a musical education.”

“Because I’m not!”

“Well, if you don’t get up soon, then we won’t have time to eat breakfast.” My stomach growled. “See! Even your stomach agrees with me.” She replied, brushing her dirty-blond hair into a high ponytail.

“Just give me a second to put on my hijab, I’ll meet you downstairs.” As Chaya ran down to the kitchen, I fastened my hijab. I had brought a blue one to match our uniforms. I dug through my worn out bag, grabbing my jersey and shorts. I was not eager for the confrontation that was to come.

**Chaya**

June 10th, 2013. Location: Sderot

By the time that Motiya made it downstairs, I was halfway through breakfast and Abba had sat down to eat his. This wasn’t going to be pretty.

“Bokair tov, Motiya.” I could see Abba analyzing her every action, glaring at her hijab. Of course he would speak to her in Hebrew, since she hardly knew it.

“Bokair oar” Motiya responded, clearly recognizing Abba’s disdain for her. She began to eat some yogurt. Abba was already in his work clothes. An Iron Dome missile shield operator, he considered just about anyone from the Gaza Strip to be a threat to Israel’s safety. If he’d had his way, I wouldn’t have joined the Peres Center for Peace’s football program. Despite the point of the program being to spread peace between Palestinians and Israelis, he was reluctant to try. He rarely came to my games.

Ema walked into the room, her caramel, curly hair swept into a sleek ponytail. “Eitan, I’m going to drive the girls up to the field,” she announced in Arabic, “If you could come join us, that would be great.”

“Honey, you know I’d love to, but I have to go to work. Just going to a peaceful football game isn’t going to stop the Palestinians from firing missiles at us.” Abba responded in Hebrew. He stood up, grabbed a banana out of the fruit bowl, and walked out of the room with the stiff back of a soldier.

Motiya looked at me, having guessed what he said. “I’m sorry for Hamas’ attacks.”

I turned towards her, “You have nothing to be sorry for. Eat fast, we have a Mini Mondial to win.”

**Motiya**

June 10th, 2013. Location: Football Pitch

*Tweeeet!* Coach Hannah signaled a timeout.

“Alright girls, we have about one minute left in the game. If we want to win, someone needs to score a goal. These Ashdot girls have a killer goalie. Motiya, Chaya, I want you two to share center forward. Try to fake her out and take a shot. Maya and Naima, keep an eye on the wings. And defense, great effort so far. Let’s keep it up, Turquoise Tide!”

The referee blowed his whistle and we ran back onto the pitch. A girl from the other team did a corner kick. Before her teammate could take a shot, Imania, our goalie, dived onto the ball. She picked it up, sprinted to the edge of the goal box, and punted the ball up the field. I leaped up and stopped it using my chest, but a girl on the other team ran into me. I fell backwards, my shoulder skidding against the grass. No whistle blew. I rolled over and jumped to my feet, and attempted to block her kick. Spin, reach, eight switch up, I kept at the ball until we became dangerously close to the out-of-bounds line. Reach, pivot, reach, I nudged the ball through her feet and shot it towards the goal. The goalie reached out to block, her orange pixie cut forming a feathery halo around her head. I knew that the goalie was going to snatch the ball.

“Chaya!” I shouted. Chaya ran in front of the goalie and headed the ball into the goal.

*Tweeeeet!* Then I realized that my hijab had fallen off.

**Chaya**

June 10th, 2013. Location: Football Pitch

“We did it!” I shrieked at Motiya.

“My hijab! My parents are going to kill me!” She fretted, snatching her blue hijab off of the pitch and wrapping it over her sleek, black hair.

“Girls! Come on!” Coach Hannah beckoned. We flocked to the sidelines, cheering and laughing. Snatching up our water bottles, we sat down for Coach’s after game talk. “Mazel tov, you Mini Mondial Champions! It has been a great season coaching you. Your teamwork really proves our goal for peace. I’ve enjoyed watching you all improve so quickly. Unfortunately, for most of you, this is your last year in the program. Soon you will graduate high school and move on with your life, but I want all of you to know that you will always have a place working for Peres if you want to,” Coach grinned mischievously, “Now what do you say about grabbing our medals and some ice cream?”

**Motiya**

June 10th, 2013. Location: Football Pitch

Chaya and I sat down on the bleachers with our medals hanging around our necks. I had a cone of strawberry ice cream cone and she had a bizarre mixture of blueberry and chocolate ice cream that matched her heterochromic eyes.

“I’ve decided that I’m officially opening an ice cream shop after IDF,” Chaya mused, biting chunks of her ice cream.

“And what will the flavors be? Raspberry vanilla? Peach mint?” I joked.

“I’ll start with blueberry chocolate, but strawberry-blueberry chocolate is not out of the question.”

I leaned away, clutching my cone close to my face, “No! You are not ruining my favorite flavor!”

“Come on! You need to take risks in life. I hereby prescribe you risk number one: to invent a new combination with strawberry ice cream. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir!” I offered a mock salute. “But if you aren’t going to be here anymore, then how will you know?”

“I’m not going to be working in the IDF forever, just three years. Then, I will open up the best ice cream parlor in the world while studying the effects of ice cream on the peacemaking process.”

“Wow, your political science methods have changed.”

“Why not? And you will be my co-conspirator.” Chaya brushed wisps of her hair out of her face.

I scoffed. “Like that’s going to happen. So far my future includes becoming an obedient bride and having lots of children.”

“You can always become something else,” Chaya suggested.

“Do you know what my name means? Obedient. My parents have wanted me to be the perfect Muslim daughter since I was born.” I bit my ice cream cone.

“Then what would you like to be?” Chaya inquired. I chuckled at the absurdity of the idea in my head. “What?”

“I’d take risks. I’d be an undercover agent that would take down Hamas,” I bemused.

“That’s not impossible. Have you heard of Mosab Hassan Yousef?” Chaya asked.

“Hold on. Here comes family!” I sighed.

“Moti! Moti! You were amazing!” My little brother, Shoza, exclaimed in Arabic, his mint ice cream dripping onto his white shirt.

“Good job!” Baba smiled and gave me a hug, his bushy, black beard scratching my cheek. “We are very proud of you.” Shoza walked up to Chaya who was sitting to my right.

“Shalom! Moti says that means hello!” Shoza’s seven-year-old charm was endearing.

“Yes. Shalom means hello, goodbye, and peace.” Chaya responded in Arabic.

“Really?” Shoza tapped my knee with sticky hands, “Did you know that Moti?” I laughed, but stopped when I saw Ama’s pinched face approach.

“Chaya, this is Shoza, Baba, and Ama,” I stated before Ama could begin. Chaya nodded, I could tell she recognized my attempt to divert the attention.

“Motiya Afnan,” Ama said, over enunciating like she usually did when she was angry. “Your hijab fell off in the middle of the game. And instead of picking it up and fastening it on, you kept playing.” Her voice crescendoed. Meanwhile, Shoza continued to use Chaya as an Arabic-Hebrew translator. Ama continued, “Not only did everyone see, but you exhibited clear disrespect and disobedience towards Allah.”

“Ama,” I expostulated, attempting to tuck my hair further into my hijab while wishing that I could hide in it like my hair. “I’m sorry that I didn’t notice that it was coming undone, but it is harder to keep fastened with a tie when I’m playing. You know that pins aren’t allowed for safety reasons. And Allah isn’t mad at me, if he was, then we wouldn’t have won.”

“That doesn’t excuse you from choosing to continue a football game, a sinful act for a woman to do, rather than showing respect for Allah. I’m taking away your books for a week. During that time, you will reflect on your actions.”

“Ama!” I protested.

“We are leaving in ten minutes. Shoza, come on.” Ama walked down the bleachers with Shoza in tow.

**Chaya**

June 29h, 2013 Location: Be’er Sheva

Ema is crying by the time I returned from orientation just like she did at my high school graduation. Abba’s arm is wrapped around her shoulders and he smiled at me. As I moved towards them, Abba got up and hugged me.

“You have so much chutzpah!” Abba said, as he kissed me on the top of my head as though I was a little girl.

“My little girl…..a..a… a soldier.” Ema sobbed, proud tears running down her tan face.

“Ema, don’t cry. It is just for three years.”

“Three years! What am I going to do when the siren sounds? What if I can’t find you?” Ema fretted.

“I’m not a child. I’m going to make sure that the sirens don’t sound and make sure that Hamas stops firing at us. And you will just have to remember to keep the doors open when you leave.” Ema clutched me in a tight embrace.

Abba joined the hug, “If you have any problems, I want you to call me. Be’er Sheva isn’t very far from us.” I looked up, my blue eye and brown eye meeting his cerulean pair.

“Don’t worry, Abba. I will be strong.” I pushed away from my parents and strode towards the base, the wind combing through my wavy dirty-blonde hair. I am ready to serve my country.

**Motiya**

June 29th, 2013 Location: Beit Hanoun, Motiya’s Apartment

I rose from my early morning “prayers” on my worn mat as Ama knocked my door open.

“Motiya?”

“Yes, Ama?” I responded, yawning and adjusting my hijab. Ever since my hijab fell off on the Mini Mondial’s football pitch, Ama’s been trying to find every way possible to take away my books again should I violate any of the Qu’ran’s teachings. Not that I do that on a regular basis… Now, I get up at 4:45 a.m. and fall back to sleep on my prayer mat before Ama comes into my room to make sure I don’t miss the morning prayers.

“We have some very special guests coming over this week. You, Shoza, and I are going to get food at the market in thirty minutes.” Ama stated, standing in my room’s doorway.

“But Ama! I have to go join Baba at the school.”

“Motiya, you know I don’t like you joining your father at the school all the time. People will question why all you ever do is go there or the old hospital.”

“Ama!” I protested.

She turned around and exited my room.

**Chaya**

July 1st, 2013 Location: Be’er Sheva

*Tweet!* I tucked my dusty hair into a prim bun and prepared for my next day of training, already hearing the whistles of the Kravi unit training near by.

“Chaya,” Becca mumbled, “What’s for breakfast?”

“Probably fruit.” I responded, yanking her blankets off. “Come on, you know Commander Shoshanna will not be happy if one of us is late.”

“Why don’t we all come late? Stand in solidarity….” Becca inquired, her eyelids flying shut as fast as a hummingbird’s wings.

“Or we could all come together and learn to work in solidarity,” I suggested, standing on my tiptoes to reach a shirt I had laid on top of my upper bunk. I walked towards the door to the bunker while buttoning my green fatigues. “Bec, if you aren’t out of bed in five seconds, I will drag you out of bed by your feet.”

“Ugh, fine. I guess if life itself wants me to get up, I will get up.” Becca swung her legs out of bed and stood up.

“Are you just going to use that pun as much as possible, minstrel?” I asked, fully knowing that her “life wants me to” jokes were limitless. Thank you, dear parents for naming me “life” and joining in whenever I picked lemons off of our citrus trees.

“I plan on using it more times than I use my cello bow.”

**Motiya**

July 1st, 2013 Location: Beit Hanoun, Butcher Shop

“How are the new neighbors? I heard that they have a son just a few years older than Motiya!” Samarra, the butcher’s wife questioned, hugging my mother as we walked into her small shop.

Ama smiled tersely, “I plan on finding out, we are having them over for dinner in a couple of nights. What meat do you think would go best with couscous?” Samarra led Ama over to the counter.

“All of them! Fatima, your couscous is fantastic! If I could cook some even half as good, I would be eating as well as Muhammad himself ought to.” Ama blushed, adding color to her severe black hijab and dress.

“Samarra, if I had your falafel to eat every day, I would be the happiest person alive,” Ama replied.

“Oh, you flatter me! Now how much would you like?” Samarra asked, pointing out beef cuts.

“Ama?” I called, “I’m going to take Shoza through the marketplace and grab him some food.”

“Hassenyah, hassenyah,” Ama replied distractedly. I pulled Shoza outside and headed off towards the shops that he liked. I clutched his little hand as we wandered through the streets of Beit Hanoun.

“Moti? Can we please please please go to Hared’s shop?” Shoza pleaded, his hazel eyes and caramel skin contrasting with his slightly dusty, white shirt.

“Yes. Want to lead me there?”

“Uh huh,” Shoza began walking a pace ahead of me. “See that?” He pointed out a rutted side street. “That’s where Ahmed and me play football just like you!” I smiled. “And that,” he said, gesturing at a narrow street, “Is the way you go to Baba’s school. And this is Hared’s shop street!” Shoza led me off to the right and up the street. A strange silence lingered in the air; Hared’s usual radio music could not be heard.

“Shoza,” I pulled him back a pace, “Stay close to me.” I heard no laughter, no children squealing as they chase after each other outside of Hared’s food shack.

“Moti, what’s wrong?” We turned towards the shop. The windows were shattered, the glass forming unpolished diamonds on the floor. A single light flickered in the back of the room. The entryway was covered by blue, spray painted Stars of David. *Here lies a mole. Jew conspirator. Israel lover.* The top of the doorway read. Shoza craned his neck, trying to read the words, but failing to see. “Moti? Did the Israelis do this?”

“No, Shoza.” His eyebrows knitted together with concern.

“Is Hared hassenyah?”

“He and his family are in a better place now,” I bent down and hugged Shoza’s small frame. I pasted a smile on my face, “Now, Mr. Explorer Extraordinaire, I have a new challenge for you. I would like it if you could go home and wait there while I take care of a few more errands. Hassenyah?”

“Hassenyah, Moti.” I watched Shoza turn the corner before I embraced my morbid fascination to view the scene. As I stepped through Hared’s now broken door, I squinted in the sudden change of lighting. There, in the center of the floor was Hared. His face was limp and darkened by crimson blood, rather than lit by his typical smile. Next to him was his wife, Bourva, and children; Sayed and Kadin. Blood, blood everywhere. *Jew conspirator. Israel lover.* Written in the blood of the benign. Hamas.

I ran. The blood I had stepped in left a red road to my destination. Upon reaching the decrepit hospital, I collapsed into tears behind the rotting, wooden sign. Once, this land had provided hope. There were shops and hospitals and schools. Then Hamas took over and destroyed everything.

**Chaya**

December 14th, 2013 Location: Be’er Sheva

“Hurry up, Abba! Bec will attack me with her bow if we miss the opening number!” I speed walked alongside Ema as we rushed to the building where the IDF Gifted Musicians performance would be held. As we neared the sign, Abba insisted that we stop for a picture. Ema was elegantly dressed in a pale blue sweater with darkly washed jeans; meanwhile, I’m simply wearing a greenish-tan khaki dress. You can take the soldier out of training, but you can’t take the training out of the soldier, I thought, glancing at many similarly dressed people who I recognized from training.

*Click.*

The lights dimmed and the curtain opened to Becca and Shari performing a duet of the national anthem, Hatikvah. Becca’s cello balanced out Shari’s beautiful, soprano voice. Together, we stood, swaying to the words: *Then our hope - the two-thousand-year-old hope - will not be lost: To be a free people in our land.*

**Motiya**

July 4th, 2014 Location: Beit Hanoun, Motiya’s Apartment

“Would you like more couscous, Tariq?” Ama politely asked, hovering at his shoulder with a platter.

“No, thank you.” His eyes snuck over to me, a leery smile on his face. I gritted my teeth.

“Afnan agha,” Tariq’s father said, “Shall we go discuss?”

Baba scratched his beard, “Hassenyah.”

Tariq’s father shot him a look, “I will head home, Baba,” Tariq said, pushing his chair away from the table and standing up without looking away from me. Ever since Tariq and his father moved into the apartment upstairs, he’s had his eye on me. After we had them over for dinner once and realized that Tariq and his father had ties to Hamas, life has gotten worse. It was no accident that they moved nearby. No, they moved nearby to pressure Baba. *You are helping unite us,* Tariq’s father had said *if you teach this in your schools. If you let us use the building occasionally.* Now, Baba’s curriculum is Hamas’ curriculum. Now, Baba and his students are shields. Not to protect the people, to protect the rockets. Meanwhile, I act as the “obedient” daughter.

“Motiya,” Ama’s voice is stern, and I snapped out of my thoughts.

“Yes, Ama?”

“It is time for us to leave the room.”

Reluctantly, I followed Ama from the kitchen to the living room where Shoza sat, eyes fixated on our old television.

“I’m going to bed. Keep an eye on your brother, and do *not* eavesdrop on the discussion.”

“Yes, Ama.” She left the room, strands of her graying hair falling out of her hijab as she loosened its tight embrace.

“Shoza, what are you watching?”

“Pioneers of Tomorrow! I’m gonna be just like them!” Shoza excitedly exclaimed.

“What do you mean?” I inquired, adjusting my hijab.

“I’m gonna free our land from the stupid Jews and kill them so we can be happy forever!” Shoza smiled and looked up at me, expecting praise. “See, this is proof,” he pointed at the image of an “Israeli” attacking a giant mouse, “They are hurting Farfour, the mouse!” Shoza’s eyebrows wrinkled with sympathy and concern, “We need to kill the Israelis so we can liberate Al-Aqsa and save Farfour!”

“Shoza!” I admonished, attempting to keep my voice quiet, “That’s not true! None of it is.”

“Then why is it on television? Because people need to know the truth!” Shoza argued.

“Because anything can be on television if people pay for it to be there,” I responded, “Shoza, do you remember Chaya? From football?”

“I said shalom to her!”

“Well, she’s an Israeli Jew. Does she act like she stole our land and has taken over Al-Aqsa?” I queried.

“No, but that’s what my schoolbook says they did. And school teaches us the truth.” Shoza protested, clearly confused over the “evil” nature of Jews and Israelis.

“That’s false.”

“It can’t be! The United Nations owns the school, and Baba teaches there, and they wouldn’t lie!” Shoza’s voice rose.

“Shhh…we have to be quiet, Baba will be mad if we interrupt them.”

“Moti, what are they talking about anyways?”

“Me. They are planning my future,” I said, mood darkening.

“What do you mean? Are you moving away?” Shoza asked.

“Not really, Baba “wants” me to marry Tariq.”

“Congratulations!” Shoza leaped to his feet and gave me a hug.

“Yes, congratulations,” I dryly echoed, hopes hitting the floor. Nearly nineteen years old, and soon I would be a bitter bride.

**Chaya**

July 11th, 2014 Location: Sderot

“Bec! I told you that Ema would be happy to have you over for the weekend, stop fretting.”

“But Chaya, she would probably prefer to spend time with you, not me,” Becca worried, tying her curly, black hair into a messy bun.

“Stop your worrying, we have to catch the bus.” With a mother who died in childbirth and a father who was killed by a suicide bus bomb when she was twelve, Becca never felt like she belonged anywhere. Ema and Abba fervently tried to fix that whenever she stayed at our house, making her kugel, matzo ball soup, and schwarma. Still, Becca always worried, at least most of the time she poured her worry into her music.

As we boarded the bus marked “Sderot,” we breathed a sigh of relief. Thank goodness for air conditioning. We sat down in the emergency exit row as usual and before we had left the station, I nodded off.

“Maybe I should just leave Chaya here…” A voice murmured in my ear, ”That means more food for me, if only she would wake up so I could get off.”

I snapped my head up, my eyes settling on the culprit. “Very funny, Becca. How long was I asleep?”

“About forty minutes. You missed a couple of missiles flying by and slept through a couple of air sirens.” Becca stood up and slung her backpack over her shoulder.

“Ours or theirs?” I asked as we exited the bus. After Operation Protective Edge began three days ago, even more missiles had been coming from the Gaza Strip into Israel than ever before.

“Theirs. One of them got intercepted, kudos to your Abba, so it must have been headed towards Be’er Sheva.” We walked a few meters down from the bus stop and turned towards my house’s driveway. 29 Ha-Rambam Street. Home sweet….I dropped my bag and ran through the open door, smelling smoke.

“Ema? Ema!” I cried, as I ran into the kitchen where the oven was on fire. “Bec! Grab the fire extinguisher!” Becca darted into the kitchen, and grabbed the fire extinguisher nestled behind the door.

“Open the door!” She shouted, as she aimed the nozzle at the smoldering oven. I yanked open the door, wincing as my hand touched the hot handle and jumped back as Becca put out the fire.

“I think we got it,” I commented. I grabbed an ice cube from the freezer and clutched it in my throbbing hand.

“Shalom? Shalom?” Ema darted into the kitchen, eyes jumping to the oven where a puddle of white foam lay. “Are you two okay?” She swept Becca and me into a hug, then pulled away, “What happened?”

“Mrs. Chaviva, you left your oven on.” Becca sheepishly gestured towards the foamy mess.

“And it started a small fire,” Ema finished Becca’s sentence. “I forgot to turn it off when the siren sounded. I had such a nice kugel cooking for you two….” Her face fell.

“It’s okay, Ema. It is better for you to go to the shelter than to stop and fiddle with the oven.” I comforted, “Where is Abba?”

“He’s been working longer hours with the whole conflict going on,” Ema sat down at the table, “They moved him to a station closer to Tel Aviv, but he said he would try to visit while you’re here.” Ema turned her head towards Becca who was sneakily eating a dark chocolate Elite bar. Becca blushed, a light pink peppering her brown cheeks, as she made eye contact with Ema, who smiled. “I like your alternate dinner idea!”

“Bec, trying to steal my chocolate bars again?” I inquired, stepping towards her.

“Your chocolate bars?” She was incredulous, “Since when are these your chocolate bars?”

“All chocolate bars are mine,” I joked.

“Well, I’m saving them from your weird concoctions!” Becca protested. “I do not want to see you combining the poor things with mint ice cream ever again. Mint ice cream ruins everything!”

**Motiya**

July 11th, 2014 Location: Beit Hanoun, Motiya’s Apartment

I never thought that I would be thankful for Hamas, but because of their stupid attacks on Israel, Tariq has been called away to Rafah. No Tariq, no wedding, no life stuck with a killer for a husband. A murderer who is probably murdering right now. Setting up traps in “secret tunnels” that help destroy the “enemy.” I hope the tunnels collapse with him inside. I hope Chaya becomes a commander of the IDF and fires a missile at him. Please forgive me, Allah, for these horrid thoughts. I just…just…

Yesterday, Baba made me give my football to Shoza. *It isn’t proper,* he said, *for* *you to have it.* I had protested, exclaiming that he had encouraged me to play in the first place. That I wouldn’t play with it in the streets. But no. *It isn’t proper.* Why not? Because I’m a *young woman and young women do not play football in the streets.* I saw Shoza playing with my football today. Eight years old and he already has great form. How I would love to join him. But Baba took away my sneakers, leaving me with my flat sandals.

Baba never would have done this before. He’s afraid. I know it, he knows it. We all are afraid. What is one to do with an enemy that claims to be for you while subjecting you to pain? That shares your religion, but interprets it so morbidly? What is one to do?

I heard a quiet knock at my door.

Ama timidly peeked around the door, “Motiya, we have to go to the school.” I followed her out. Our voices are silent; our hair is completely concealed in black hijabs, we both wear black dresses. The only bit of color is the green, metal bracelet on my wrist that Tariq gave me. Baba forbids me to remove it. It feels like a handcuff.

Ama didn’t like me going to the school to join Baba. It wasn’t proper for a young woman to be so interested in learning. Now we go to the school together. We don’t learn when we are there. No. We go to the roof. Hands covering our ears. Smoke stealing our breath. Another missile fired, another death.

**Chaya**

August 1st, 2014 Location: Rafah

The army jeep bounced along the rutted roads as we traveled to Rafah, the farthest away place I’d been during Operation Protective Edge. My Kravi unit’s goal was to infiltrate and destroy a Hamas tunnel that has an entrance in Rafah. Luckily, Becca is with me on this mission, but she is in the other jeep.

Hadar Goldin bumped his arm against mine as the jeep slowed, waking me from my thoughts. He smiled as his brown eyes met my brown and blue pair. Ever since he became engaged to Edna two weeks ago, even kitchen duty has been unable to wipe the smile off of his face.

“You ready for this?” He asked.

“Yes.” I tightened the strap on my helmet and stepped out of the van. We had discussed the plan on the way. Commander Raffi would lead us into the house, directly followed by Hadar, Becca, and myself. Four more people would be following us in the tunnel. Three people would keep a direct watch on the entrance and house while six others patrolled the surrounding area in pairs. Raffi walked up to the door and knocked. No noise was heard. With a silencer on his gun, he fired at the lock and kicked the door ajar. Five of us ran inside, guns up. Becca and I encountered a man in the kitchen.

“Hands up! Turn around!” We shouted in Arabic. The man slowly turned around, a furious look on his face as he dropped the knife he was holding to the floor. We led him and another man into the living room and left them under the watchful eye of our comrades. Commander Raffi beckoned us back into the kitchen, and pointed at a cabinet.

“That’s the entry, note the worn patches leading away from it and the gap between it and the countertop. That’s how you identify a tunnel entrance.” Raffi opened the door, grabbed a flashlight from his belt and shined it down. It was an entrance. “Goldin, you lead everyone down. I’m going to stay near the entrance so that I can be reached faster if necessary.”

Hadar carefully dropped through the hole, flashing his light twice to show that it was safe. Becca and I followed. Hadar, Becca, and I began moving, remaining twelve meters ahead of the group to check for traps and terrorists. Ten minutes later, the tunnel bent to the right. As Hadar began to round the bend, he moved back, hands clutching his gun. He jerked his head to the right. We can’t make a sound. There were terrorists nearby. Becca and I lifted our guns, careful to make sure that if we fired, we would be firing around Hadar. Becca moved towards the wider bend of the tunnel, clinging to the wall. We turned our flashlights off. I heard the terrorists speak. There were at least four of them, and they were all men, judging from the laughter.

“Tariq, when’s the wedding going to be?” One asked in a guttural voice.

“Yes, are you going to have it during this *cease-fire*?” Another questioned.

A man, presumably Tariq responded, unaware of our presence as he approached, “As soon as possible. She’s a pretty girl.”

“That’s for sure. And judging from her mother, I bet she can cook well too.” A fourth man chimed in.

Suddenly, we heard four people’s footsteps come from behind us. We had forgotten to signal the rest of the group. They hadn’t seen us stop, as we remained hidden in the dark turn. The voices abruptly stopped. I heard the clicks of guns being readied. We were too far to signal to the rest of the group to hurry up without giving away what little mystery surrounding our location we had. In the dusty darkness of the tunnel, we saw the light of their flashlights seconds before they began to fire. Becca and Hadar, being closer to the front, began shooting first. I heard a grunt of pain and a small scream as the bullets hit two of the terrorists. The terrorists’ flashlights lolled on the ground, casting shadows on the walls and making everyone seem twice as threatening.

Before the first terrorist came into my sight, I glanced at Becca. She looked determined, dangerous, and brave. Then I saw it happen. A single bullet, followed by two more, hit her in the face. Blood blossomed on her earth colored skin. Her knees bent and she fell to the dusty ground. With horror, I moved closer, knowing that I had to take her spot, while the group approached through the narrower part of the tunnel behind me. I began firing. A bullet shot by one of the Hamas terrorists on the ground hit the strap at the top of my helmet and as I ducked another bullet, my head hit the tunnel’s wall causing my helmet to fall off.

Hadar and I kept firing, but unlike him, I was in the open whereas he had the tunnel wall to hide behind.

“Tariq, there’s more coming!” The terrorists I was firing at yelled, as he and “Tariq” shot at Hadar, hitting Hadar in the nose and throat. Like Becca, he crumpled. I could hear the group coming; they couldn’t be more than two meters away. I hit one of the terrorists in the arm, and he dropped his gun, screaming.

I turned my gun towards “Tariq.” Our eyes met. Could I kill an engaged man after the death of another engaged man? Would there be two groomless brides? I hesitated and aimed at his leg. As I pulled the trigger, pain erupted on my forehead.

*That’s where you want to hit the football*, Coach Hannah had told us, *then it won’t hurt your head.* She had paired me up to practice with a new Palestinian girl that day, a girl named

**Motiya**

August 9th, 2014 Location: Beit Hanoun, Motiya’s Apartment

Tariq sat across the table from me as he proudly boasted his exploits. The Israelis had arrested his father a week ago. However, the wedding would be in two weeks when his father would be released, and I couldn’t surmise how I could possibly marry him. Earlier this week, I told Baba that I wouldn’t marry Tariq. Baba had slapped me. Baba had never slapped me before.

As Tariq paused his story to grab some more of Ama’s fantastic couscous, I asked, “Why are you limping?” Ama bit her lower lip, scared that Baba or Tariq would be displeased by my question.

“I was getting to that,” Tariq grumbled. “I was in the tunnels last week and we were ambushed by the Israelis. It was a shootout. We took down three Israelis before we had to leave. One of them, a devil girl, hit me in the leg before I hit her in the head.”

“A devil girl?” Baba inquired.

“Yes, she had devil eyes. One was colored, the other was brown. Her hair was the same grit color as the dust in the tunnels. She just kept shooting and shooting. Even as she fell, she kept shooting at the tunnel itself, trying to get it to collapse. And now,” Tariq smirked, “she has collapsed.”

My heart pounded in my chest, my pulse punching against the green metal bracelet on my wrist. All I could think of was Chaya. The rest of the evening passed quickly, for the first time that summer, I was oblivious to the sound of rockets and guns. I sat on my bed, holding my Mini Mondial medal, the last remnant of my life when it was at peace. Still, I can’t keep it anymore. Carefully, I ripped a sheet of paper out of my old school notebook. I neatly wrote “*One day this all will change, we will treat people the same, we will stop with the violence, and say down with the hate.”* Reaching for my medal, I wrapped my message around it.

Not bothering with shoes, I snuck out of our apartment and walked through the quiet violence of the night. I could hear the abusive fathers, the praying mothers, a child crying. I heard the people, not the weapons….but is there a difference? Words. What a great power they have. Ideas, what fear they can cause or hope they can bring. Are ideas and words more than ammunition for the human guns?

As I stepped through the shrapnel littered streets, with my hijab loose around my head, I neared the old hospital. Cautiously, I climbed over concrete wreckage to a small sign that read, “Recovery Wing.” With a bent piece of metal, I dug a small hole and placed my medal and the message within.

“Goodbye, Chaya,” I murmured as I buried the medal and message. “Wherever you are now, I hope there is football and ice cream and music and….” My voice cracked with tears, “and peace.”

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* Shoza is a popular boy name that means “brave one” or “fighter.”
* Tariq means “conqueror.”
* Samarra, Fatima, Afnan, and Naima are also popular Arabic names.

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* Kravi units (combat units) go through at least seven months of training before being placed in action.
* The IDF is the Israeli Defense Force.
* After graduating high school, Israeli teens serve in the IDF.
* Girls usually serve for about three years.

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* The majority of the soldiers that were fighting were the regular ones (the ones that were serving after graduating high school), but many reserve fighters were called in as well.
* The soldiers hadn’t thoroughly trained for tunnel destruction and fighting.
* The Iron Dome system saved hundreds of lives on both sides by firing missiles that intercepted those from the Gaza Strip midair.
* Operation Protective Edge began on July 8th, 2014.
* IDF ground attacks began on July 17th, 2014.

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* Hamas uses civilians as human shields for launching missiles.
* Hamas fired from civilian populated areas (including near United Nations schools).

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* The hijab represents obedience to Allah.
* The hijab is a symbol of modesty and respect.
* Women wear their hijab everywhere except inside their homes (but only if they aren’t entertaining guests).
* Hijabs are meant to cover women’s hair.
* In Islamic culture, women often marry young.

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* When the rocket siren goes off in Sderot, the people open their doors and then run.

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<http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x\_context=56&x\_miscitem=20>.

* Hamas is dedicated to the obliteration of Israel.
* Its flag color is green with white writing.
* Uses all forms of propaganda available, especially television and school textbooks.
* Educators are required to fulfill their Islamic duty by helping Hamas.
* Believes that a nation can only thrive and prevail under Islam.
* Anti-semitic.
* Traitors to Islam will be killed.
* Al-Aqsa Mosque must be liberated through the destruction of Israel.

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* The schoolchildren will follow the host authorities’ curricula and textbooks.

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* Beit Hanoun was filled with rubble by the end of Operation Protective Edge.

"Girls Football For Peace." *Peres Center for Peace*. Peres Center for Peace, n.d.

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<http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peres-center.org%2Fgirls\_football>.

* Near the end of the school year, all the teams meet up for a “Mini Mondial” that is modeled on the World Cup.
* The program is dedicated to creating peace between Palestinian and Israeli youth.
* The Fair-Play Football program places girls from the Gaza Strip on the same team as Israeli girls, teaching them to work together and build friendships.
* The program aims to empower children and teenagers through fun extra-curriculars and lasting friendships.

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* Chaya means “life” in Hebrew.
* Ema means “mother” in Hebrew.
* Abba means “father” in Hebrew.
* Motiya means “obedient” in Arabic.
* Baba means “father” in Arabic.
* Ama means “mother” in Arabic.
* Hassenyah means “fine” or “okay” in Arabic.

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* The Iron Dome system saved many lives during Operation Protective Edge.
* The Iron Dome system used missiles to protect the Israelis while Hamas used people to protect its missiles.

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*Protective Edge*. Web. 13 Feb. 2015. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/

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* Hadar Goldin was killed on August 1st, 2014.
* Hadar and a few other soldiers were killed in a shootout in a tunnel.
* The tunnel was located in Rafah with an entrance from a house.
* Hadar had brown eyes.
* Hadar was engaged to a girl named Edna.
* Hadar was described as a cheerful person by his friends and family.

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* Schools end on June 20th.

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data=!3m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1s0x1500492432a7c98b:0x6a6b422013352cba>.

* 29 Ha-Rambam Street is a small house located near a bus stop.
* Be’er Sheva is a town located about a 40 minute drive from Sderot.
* Beit Hanoun is a Gaza Strip city located near the border between Israel and Gaza.

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* “All my life I've been waiting for/ I've been praying for/ For the people to say/ That we don't wanna fight no more/ There will be no more wars/ And our children will play/ One day, one day,” are lyrics from Matisyahu’s “One Day” song.

*Pioneers of Tomorrow*. *Youtube*. Youtube, n.d. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeii225G-HM>.

* A children’s television show that preaches Islamic jihad.
* In one episode, a mouse named Farfour is killed by “Israeli” soldiers because he was trying to “liberate” Al-Aqsa mosque.
* Teaches children that they need to free “Palestine” from the filthy, plundering Jews.
* Explains that killing Jews is necessary to free “Palestine.”
* Has ties to Hamas.

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* After Israel left the Gaza Strip in 2005, Hamas and other Islamic militants looted and destroyed the hospitals, greenhouses, schools, and shops.

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<http://sderotmedia.org.il/kassam-eng.html>.

* Sderot is only 2.5 kilometers from Gaza, so the Gaza Strip is visible from the town.
* Over 600 Israeli citizens were injured or psychologically traumatized during Operation Protective Edge because of the rocket attacks.

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* Mosab worked as a double agent for Shin Bet, helping Shin Bet arrest many Hamas terrorists.